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SHARON A. JACKSON, COUNSELOR, M.S., MIMSC  
CERTIFIED CLINICAL HYPNOTHERAPIST  
103 SOUTH 3RD STREET, SUITE 102  
OZARK, MISSOURI 65721  
(417) 773-2524



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# HOW TO TELL IF YOU ARE CODEPENDENT

We hear the term, but most people have no idea what codependency is or if they indeed are codependent. So, what is codependency? According to Wikipedia: Codependency is defined as a psychological condition or a relationship in which a person is controlled or manipulated by another who is affected with a pathological condition (typically narcissism or drug addiction); and in broader terms, it refers to the dependence on the needs of, or control of, another. It also often involves placing a lower priority on one's own needs, while being excessively preoccupied with the needs of others. Codependency can occur in any type of relationship, including family, work, friendship, romantic, peer or community relationships. Codependency may also be characterized by denial, low self-esteem, excessive compliance, or control patterns. Narcissists are considered to be natural magnets for the codependent.

How can you tell if you are a Codependent -- with all the differing definitions out there? This may be difficult to realize, despite 40 years of public documentation and support on the subject; but it is quite prevalent among men and women and among certain (caregiving) professions. Children are more dependent, of necessity; but adult Codependency is simply unpleasant -- mostly for you, but also *everyone* around you.

Although an understanding of Codependence is difficult to condense into a definition, a good working definition of Codependence might be, "Underdeveloped self esteem (dysfunctional boundaries) combined with an inappropriate caring for others (invading a boundary), and an inappropriate reliance on another's response (having poor boundaries), in a negatively reinforcing loop". In *Codependency for Dummies* Darlene Lancer, MFT defines it as someone "who can't function from his or her innate self, and instead, organizes thinking and behavior around a

process, or other person(s)." Thus all addicts are included. You are a caring person, and there is nothing wrong with nurturing; we are all *interdependent*. Just a little self-examination, and redirection, may have you on a more fulfilling path.

You could say you're over your Codependency when you recognize just how good you are! Although it's tricky, because some people have inflated self-esteem to cover-up low self-worth, like narcissists. Codependents are usually highly capable people, but many, particularly women, have difficulty motivating themselves without a friend, job, or external structure, like a class assignment. They look for confidence and assurance from others. The only affirmation you really need is your own; recognizing that kudos from a respected peer are always nice. If "love yourself" makes *you* uncomfortable, don't expect others to magically love you. Unfortunately, denial is a major obstacle, because Codependency is difficult to see in yourself. Awareness is a major first step to a new concept, and awareness alone often alleviates many symptoms.

It is important to note that most people exhibit codependent behaviors in certain situations, and a snapshot of most anyone might be seen below; this is different from being a Codependent (capital C), who may be hard to find below!

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Codependency is a pattern of relating that is characterized by living through or for another, controlling others, attempting to fix other people's problem, and intense anxiety around intimacy. It occurs when someone (spouse, parent, sibling, coworkers, or friend) allows another person's addicted or dysfunctional behavior to consume their own thoughts, feelings or behavior.

**HOW TO STOP CODEPENDENCY AND SET BOUNDARIES**



DR. SUSAN KRIEGLER

## Continued: HOW TO TELL IF YOU ARE CODEPENDENT

This article is to help you find your Codependency, and it is not recommended that you confront or attempt an "intervention" for someone else, even if you know for a fact that they are a Codependent--while a very few may respond well to a book (such as: *Codependent No More*, by Melody Beattie) being placed on their desk, or a link to this article in their email, for most, especially those who identify very strongly or completely with their ego (your ego is not who you are), it will feel like an attack; we are dealing with the human condition here.

Understand that if you come from a Codependent family, you have been practicing a form of nonassertive communication your whole life. Look into "Non-Violent Communication", and give it a chance; this is how mature people talk to each other.

**Realize that codependency can take many forms, *passive and/or aggressive*.** In fact, terms such as "passive-aggressive," "controlling," "doormat," "people pleaser," "bipolar," "empath," "manipulator," "narcissist" (pathological anti-codependency), "drama queen," and many others, are more or less descriptions of symptoms of codependency. Stalking is an obvious codependent behavior, although most codependents would never do this. So is fretting over your cell phone in the presence of others when you haven't gotten a call or text, and don't need to call or text anyone (demonstrating yourself to an audience, and/or longing to be "in," meshing, fusing, unwarranted personal involvement).

Codependents judge and second-guess themselves all the time. They live with anxiety that stems from underlying shame and low self-esteem. They judge what they should say or do or should have said or done. Some judge themselves as much as they judge others.

Another way to describe codependent behavior is, "feeding the behavior of an individual who is causing pain and stress to the [group] unit as a whole. These units can be the work place, school, social clubs, church, or the most prevalent place for this behavior -- the family".

We interdepend on others to become successful in our educations, jobs and careers. Married couples depend on each other, in order to raise children and pay the families bills. "Codependence" is not interdependent.

Reference: WikiHow

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Should we depend on another, or help another accomplish common goals that are *benefiting the whole*, is not the question but:

*"Are we enabling unacceptable behavior in order for us to appease that person (who is causing disruption) in order for us not to be rejected, confronted, challenged, or hated by them?"* It is well to avoid fusion with others and *confusion* of the individual's status within the unit.



**Examine your family relationships.** Codependency is a learned behavior, most often passed down through families; you learned it as a way to cope. You did *not* do anything wrong -- but, as an adult, it is an inadequate and ultimately unsuccessful way to deal in relationships. You probably feel responsible for making another person or people happy, feel guilty not helping them, and find it difficult or impossible to say, "no", but are unaware of your own motivating thoughts and feelings. You may be virtually unaware of your Codependency, although you probably constantly get clues, like funny looks, etc., which your ego demands you misinterpret, and which just make you *try harder*.

**Examine your other relationships.** Your social-life is probably unsatisfying to you; you are too busy with everyone else's "problems," work or another addiction, or may be isolating. All you may think about is other people; what they should be doing, what's best for them, etc., and if asked, you would probably say that that is what gives your life meaning. Unfortunately, you come with strings attached. You may be unhappy at best, and often suicidal at worst. Contemplate whether you are quite driven, an overachiever. You may have an opinion about everything; you may have been labeled a "type A" personality, tending toward perfectionism (possibly manic). Hyper-awareness is common in this mode.

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**CONTINUED:** Consider whether you may be uncomfortable being alone, even for an hour. It is natural to want human company, but an occasional evening alone is also normal for most people. Check your major options for a "frame of mind" which might be a fairly rapid-cycling between "miserable" and "giddy" (bipolar). "Contentedness" is probably a foreign state of mind for you. At parties, or other social settings, are you quite often an "odd man out", avoid socializing by helping the host, or are uncomfortably trying to control/help everyone have fun your way -- do you give up, withdraw from uncontrollable persons -- or duck out to escape the loud music, noise and confusion--which could be normal, but then, why did you come? Alternately, you could be an "attention hound", constantly on display for attention, and right in the middle of the crowd. Baseless groaning or other noises that attract attention are common in this mode.

**Consider whether you're compulsively-seeking acceptance.** Do you hide your truth to avoid disapproval? Do you find yourself often explaining your issues to someone, or providing a running commentary when it's unnecessary (to one who is mostly not listening, as it is irrelevant to them)? If no one else is present in the same room, you may be explaining anyway to yourself. Even your manipulative actions, often done in the open, are seeking acclaim or affirmation, expecting "they should agree; it's the best thing--for them".

Observe here, when no one asked for your opinion, that anyone not telling you to "mind your own beeswax" is being kind or confused (you have subconsciously developed syntax that makes it difficult for others to back down gracefully). Anyone unfortunate enough to have pegged you as a "sympathetic ear", probably a stranger, is going to get more than they bargained for in your (manipulative) empathic behavior, as "Let me help (control) you". Another common way to describe Codependency that may bring it to light for you is that your center moves around, from yourself to the other--you often don't stay centered.

**Recognize that even aggressive Codependents may have an obsequious (doormat) side.** In attempting to show respect you may feel a need to be unhealthily "submissive". In a sense, your boss is your equal. You should not find yourself receding or feeling subjugated. Consider whether you are often accused of being wishy-washy or double-minded as you agree with what you disagree. You can be a chameleon. Schizophrenia can be a result of codependency. You may have trouble holding on to your ideas or opinions when others disagree. You may not know what you think or feel.

**Examine the idea that you may be "accident" prone, and often in a hurry for no reason.** You may choke on food or drink much more often than is normal as a result. You may trip over others while pressing in, not giving others their personal space, making your presence unavoidable.

**Notice that you may be waiting for the other person to just listen.** You are not seeking or allowing real discussion, but making pronouncements, and issuing edicts. While someone else is talking, you are generally just waiting, probably broadcasting impatience (or insisting) for them to stop so you can make your next announcement.

**See that you rely on others for your happiness--if you can call it that--which for you, hinges on another's agreement.**

See yourself almost demanding to "let me help you": You may be easily taken in, have little discernment (you may be seen as a "sucker"). You may have no problem *throwing your pearls before swine*, as you want to be used. You may have friends that you consider "projects."

A Codependent's *dogs*, having no choice in the matter of "agreement", will become codependent. While this may sound impossible, or strange, observe dogs in a suspected codependent relationship acting impossible or strange.

An interesting note here is that these dogs may be either "well-socialized" with other dogs, or not, and the way they act around, and are treated by other dogs provides many clues to Codependency.

A dog that has not been socialized with other dogs will often act "codependently" around them anyway--centering themselves in the other dogs space, etc., so this may or may not be a clue as to the owner's state of emotional development. Socializing the dog with other dogs (and letting the other dogs 'train' the unsocialized one without interfering) will take care of this. A more reliable gauge for the owner's state here is how the dog acts around other people. Children and animals are in a codependent position; they rely on you completely--it is not an interdependent relationship. This doesn't mean that they should be *treated*, or be 'acting out' codependently; they should be being trained for interdependency.

**Recognize that you are almost surely a goodhearted person.**

People are or become codependent because they *care*; which has to be better than *not* caring; recognize that there is a better way to care. You want what's best; but therefore, everyone else should want what you want, in your opinion--and any other opinions may be, at best, secondary to yours. Other People need room to express themselves, too. You are a perfectionist with yourself and others. It may be difficult (if not impossible) to do anything for you, as you may be quick to point out deficiencies in any effort made for you ; you mean this to be constructive, but it is just sniping, *making the perfect the enemy of the good*. You may not accept compliments or favors well. You may reject proffered gifts, only to exclaim later that you could have used that!

"I'm sorry" may rarely be heard from you, except when it is obviously necessary, and then it can come out more like, "I'm sorry you feel that way." Situations in which the most passing "sorry" would suffice may make you uncomfortable; but some Codependents say, "I'm sorry" all the time just to keep the peace, because they hate conflict.

You have trouble asking for help, and try to be self-sufficient. It may be helpful or instructive for you to practice *asking* a friend (or maybe a stranger) for help, in any little way; just, "Hey, I could use some help on..." Follow that with a, "Hey, thanks". If this is difficult for you, take heed.

**Realize that now is all you will ever have.** You may live for the future, or think about the past, constantly. Observe how often you may think that life, for you, will be better "when..." or "If only..." but you may have difficulty actually carrying out a constructive plan for the future. The concepts, "Be Here Now" or "Live in the Moment" may be pretty much a foreign concept to you.